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SUBJECT: SICHUAN PARTY SCHOOL ON IMPLEMENTATION OF "HARMONIOUS SOCIETY"

REF: BEIJING 620

CLASSIFIED BY: James A. Boughner, Consul General, United States
Consulate, Chengdu.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: Officials from the Sichuan Province Party School and Organization Department said the Harmonious Society doctrine represents a significant change from the "class struggle"-oriented Marxism that was the former ideological focus of Party member education. While actual implementation of the concept is still in its early stages, in general it encourages Party members to work toward development, peace and stability. Zhou Zhibin, Vice President of the Sichuan Party School said "deliberative democracy" promotes consultation, tolerance and understanding. According to Zhou, Harmonious Society will achieve a balance between centralism and democracy at the local level by shifting from a previous focus solely on economic development to one which values service. Democratic experiments at the local level include the phasing out of the "secretaries working meeting" and the broadening of the representative nature of party committees.

¶2. (C) Training for cadres now focuses on integrating practical experience and ideology, as well as on developing relationships outside of the Party, according to Wang Chuan, Vice President of the Sichuan Organization Department. The cadre evaluation and promotion system is also under revision to reflect Harmonious Society's new emphasis on improving people's livelihoods, unemployment, and gaps in development rather than solely improving GDP numbers. Sichuan Province appears to be moving forward slowly on implementing Harmonious Society, and its Party School and Organization Department leaders are unwilling or unable to comment on ongoing debates about Harmonious Society.
End Summary

¶3. (C) On January 18, Congenoff and visiting EAP Desk Officer Marc Abramson met with the Zhou Zhibin, Vice President of the Sichuan Party School, Li Xin, Director of the Sichuan Administration Institute (the non-Party "government" side of the Sichuan Party School), and Mr. Xiao, Director of the Training Department of the Sichuan Party School, to discuss the training Party members receive on implementation of the "Harmonious Society" policy. In a separate meeting on January 19, we met with Wang Chuan, Vice President of the Sichuan Province Organization Department, which oversees Party personnel matters and is involved in Party training and ideological education.

What is "Harmonious Society?"

¶4. (C) The Harmonious Society doctrine, also referred to as Socialist Harmonious Society, represents a significant change from the "class struggle"-oriented Marxism that was the former ideological focus of Party member education, according to Zhou. The new policy is much broader and targets all levels of cadres and Communist Party members. Both Zhou, and Wang, in a separate meeting, said Harmonious Society works toward the goals of development, peace and stability, and that the related Scientific Development Concept is a guiding ideology (zhidao sixiang) to assist in attaining these goals. Wang noted the Scientific Development Concept, as a "comprehensive platform" (tongling), was ideologically more important than Harmonious Society, which he characterized as a "development goal." Zhou admitted "Harmonious Society" is an abstract concept in its initial stage, and that the basic framework is still under development.

¶5. (C) According to Zhou, unlike the New Socialist Countryside program (introduced as a formal goal at the plenary session of the National People's Congress in March 2006) and the goal of achieving a Relatively Well-off Society (xiaokang shehui) -- first raised during Jiang Zemin's tenure as Party General Secretary -- which have quantitative goals, Harmonious Society

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has no specific numerical targets. He added that local level governments down to at least the county level have new "implementation offices" (tuijin ban) to carry out the "New Socialist Countryside," but did not mention the existence of similar organizations relating to Harmonious Society.

Deliberative Democracy

¶6. (C) In response to a question from Abramson, Zhou said that while the Party recognized two basic forms of democracy,

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electoral democracy and "deliberative democracy" (xieshang minzhu), the Party was currently focused much more on the latter. In the context of Harmonious Society, he viewed the role of "deliberative democracy" as promoting the resolution of disputes outside of the court system, thereby avoiding costly and contentious lawsuits. Specifically, Zhou said the system should promote mutual consultation, tolerance and understanding.

He lamented the fact that electoral democracy does not always achieve an ideal outcome, using competitive elections as an example. Without giving further details, Zhou gave as an example that village officials elected in competitive elections face many obstacles. (Note: Zhou's general comment on problematic outcomes of local elections is interesting given that Sichuan Province has a history of being touted as a model in China for village-level democratic reform and experimentation. End Note.)

Democratic Centralism

¶7. (C) In response to a question on how Harmonious Society will achieve a balance between centralism and democracy at the local level, Zhou said policy has shifted from a previous focus solely on economic development to one which also values providing public services and public goods. The key to achieving a balance, he continued, is a system evaluating and supervising local officials that provides carrots and sticks for government to create this balance. Zhou gave an example of views toward achieving targets in reduction of sulfur dioxide emissions. In the past, the view was that development should be "both fast and good," (you kuai, you hao), but this formulation has now been reversed, as part of the goal of a harmonious society, to having "both good and fast" development (you hao, you kuai), implying it is more important to have balanced development than simply rapid growth. Today, according to Zhou, officials are taught development should not take place at the expense of the environment.

18. (C) Separately, Wang said the Sichuan Organization Department was instructed by Beijing to study how to "systematize" the implementation of democratic centralism in Sichuan. He opined it was necessary to carry out consultations inside and outside the Party during the process of choosing provincial bureau (ting) and prefecture-level Party secretaries (formally done by party congresses). Wang also said that a key part of democratic centralism was spreading out policy-making powers. Wang noted that the head of the Sichuan Propaganda Department had recently issued directions for Party bodies in Sichuan to be more open and transparent in their operations.

Democratic Experiments at the Local Level

19. (C) When asked about reform of the institution of the "secretaries working meeting" (shuji bangonghui) in Sichuan, Wang replied the meeting went away "naturally" at the county level when the number of party deputy secretaries was reduced from 6-10 to only two. (Note: The "secretaries working meeting" was a decision-making body at the sub-provincial level made up of the party secretary and the deputy party secretaries of an organization or government which was regularly used to circumvent, and often render irrelevant, the approved decision-making bodies of the party committee and the party standing committee. End Note.) The representative nature of party committees (quan wei hui) is also broader, Wang said. For example, county-level party committees now meet every four months on a fixed schedule, as opposed to the previous practice of once or twice a year, and will also meet on an ad hoc basis to meet particular needs. This reform, however, has not yet reached the prefecture level (one level above the county). The party standing committee meets more frequently than the party committee.

Is Democracy a Good Thing?

110. (C) When asked if he had an opinion on the controversial book "Democracy Is a Good Thing" by Beijing scholar Yu Keping, Zhou claimed he had not heard of it (Reftel). He instead commented on the recent Chinese television program, "The Rise of Great Nations." He noted the show had developed out of a 2003 Politburo study session on the topic and said that he drew two basic messages from the show. First, democratic systems only function successfully under strong federal systems. He noted that the weak American federal government in the nineteenth

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century had led to the Civil War. Second, he opined that European social democracy was successful because it was able to effectively provide social goods to the populace. In general, Zhou concluded, only slightly tongue in cheek, that the show demonstrated democracy was a good thing and that, without democracy, there could be no socialism. In response to a question on the debate over efficiency versus fairness, Zhou responded that the lesson of the European socialist model was that the combination of increased wealth and increased equality led to increased economic efficiency.

Training for Cadres: Service, Law and Management

111. (C) Xiao, Director of the Training Department at the Sichuan Party School, described the recently initiated five-year plan for the curricula of the linked Sichuan Provincial Party School and School of Administration. The Party School emphasizes theory and improvement of cadres' governing abilities, and the School of Administration focuses on practical management techniques. The three principle course areas for the students -- most of whom are county or deputy county heads or hold equivalent ranks as department directors or vice directors -- are 1) public servant awareness (gongpu yishi), 2) legal administration (yifa xingzheng), and 3) management (guanli).

112. (C) Xiao listed several current courses offered to county and department-level officials in a typical two-month training course: "Basic Theory and Practical Knowledge," "Law and the Administrative Approval Process," "Modern Management," "History

and Cultural Experience," (including teaching Laozi and Tang Dynasty poetry) and "Basic Skills." Xiao described the last course's goals of teaching social surveying and reporting skills. Part of the class entails having students conduct one-week on-site surveys of developed areas in Eastern China and underdeveloped areas in Western China. Xiao added that the curriculum included 33 topics on Harmonious Society, including, among others, social development (health and education), minority policy and social management. The school will begin to use case studies as a teaching tool this year.

¶13. (C) In response to a question on whether Party members' attitudes were changing, Director Zhou responded that they now focused more on practicality (shiyong zhuyi) as opposed to idealism (lixiang zhuyi), and that this was a positive evolution. However, he did note that the members' level of ideological sophistication was somewhat lacking compared with cadres of his generation (Zhou appeared to be in his late 50s or early 60s). Separately, Wang of the Organization Department noted that training is no longer limited to a Party focus, but rather strives to work on relationships with elements outside the Party and to deal with the many economic disparities and "contradictions" currently facing Chinese society. He also emphasized the flexible and multi-faceted nature of current training, and echoed Zhou's description of an integration of practice and theory. As an example, he stressed the need to adapt Western theories of governance to China's conditions, and highlighted internships for government employees in the United States and Europe that include both a study and work aspect. (Note: The Sichuan Organization Department annually sends three groups of students to Minnesota to study public management and intern at local Minnesota government offices. End Note.)

¶14. (C) At the village level, 500,000 leaders were trained nationally in 2006, according to Wang, completing planned training for all village heads. Wang said he had personally trained the village heads in Sichuan. A similar plan to train all county leaders would be completed by the end of 2008. The funding for this training came only from the provincial level and below. In general, new county heads and Party secretaries receive between three weeks and three months of training soon after they are promoted. Other officials attend training classes in Sichuan in order to meet a requirement to receive training at least once every five years. At the provincial department (ting) level, Sichuan sends approximately 20-30 cadres each year to Beijing for central training. Wang added that their training schedule has accelerated in the last year because of the large turnover in personnel tied to the ongoing election of new party congresses and people's congresses at the provincial and local levels.

Evaluation of Cadres

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¶15. (C) Zhou said Sichuan had not started modifying its system of evaluating local officials (kaohe tixi) to reflect the new socioeconomic goals outlined under Harmonious Society, but he noted that other provinces had begun to do so. Zhou pointed out that his school offered an entire class on how to evaluate government work, and he argued that proper supervision of government work aimed at providing services to the public was more important than centralizing administrative authority.

¶16. (C) Wang was more forthcoming with details of how the system was being revised, noting that pilot projects had been carried out in 2006, but that no set standards had yet been established in Sichuan. He added that standards would inevitably differ to some extent within the province based on regional characteristics. Among the standards currently being used or under consideration, he listed employment, environmental protection, mode of production, efficiency of growth, social issues (health, poverty, education), and the management of taxation as specific factors considered in the evaluation process. He stressed that the emphasis of the new standards would be on meeting the concerns of ordinary citizens.

¶17. (C) Wang also explained that public opinion surveys were a mandatory part of the evaluation process for all officials below the provincial level who were up for promotion. He described three methods that local governments in Sichuan were currently using to assess "public" opinion about particular officials: 1. Anonymous voting by local non-Party bodies sanctioned by the United Front Work Department, e.g., local people's congresses, local people's political consultative conferences, and local representatives from the approved "democratic parties;" 2. Internet polls on government websites; 3. Advertisements by local governments soliciting comments from citizens. In response to a question, Wang said the most important change from the old evaluation system was that there was no longer an overriding emphasis on just one number: GDP. Now, people's livelihoods, unemployment and gaps in development were being considered, though GDP growth would still be important.

Unresponsive on implementation details

¶18. (C) Zhou was unwilling or unable to respond to questions on structural reforms or leadership changes that could have an impact on Harmonious Society. He was reluctant to answer questions on changes to local government budget authority, and asserted the Party School had not done research on the topic. He did not indicate that there had been any experiments in Sichuan on reforming local government budgetary processes. When questioned about new Sichuan Party Secretary Du Qinglin's role in the province and whether he was assigned to implement Harmonious Society, Director Zhou was unwilling to comment. In response to a question, Wang said he did not view one of the goals of Harmonious Society as controlling the power of local Party secretaries.

¶19. (C) Zhou also ducked a question on the relationship of people's democracy to inner-Party democracy, though he did note the importance of the latter in the Party's political development. Instead, he wanted to focus on recent inner-Party reform pilot projects that have been successful in Sichuan, such as the Standing Committee system (changrenzhi) for local Party congresses and the system of "open nomination, open selection" (gongtui gongxuan) of government/Party officials. He noted that the Party school was now teaching a class on "open nomination, open selection." Wang also discussed these pilots, noting that the changrenzhi pilot carried out in Ya'an had still not been fully evaluated by the Party.

Comment

¶20. (C) Sichuan Province appears to be moving forward slowly on implementing the Harmonious Society concept. Sichuan Party School leaders were unwilling or unable to comment on ongoing Harmonious Society debates, perhaps reflecting their own confusion about the specifics of the policy and how it should be executed. The fact that Sichuan has opened "implementation offices" (tuijin ban) to carry out the New Socialist Countryside policy may indicate increased bureaucratic muscle behind implementation of the directive.

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